

2013 4th Annual Six-Pillar Essay Contest

Award Winning Essays – Countywide Public and Private Schools

Elementary Schools

2nd Grade – 1st Place

While in second grade, I am practicing my Character Counts Pillars. I am also helping my family learn the Character Counts Pillars. The six Pillars are Caring, Fairness, Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, and Citizenship.

I use the Pillar of Caring with my Mom. We put labels and stamps on letters for the Christmas Baskets and Soccer Forms. I help my Dad use Citizenship. We pick up trash around the Nursery. I teach my Brother the Fairness Pillar. We play games together at night.

2nd Grade – 2nd Place

Thank you for being our Character Counts coach. I am glad you have been teaching us here at Galena Elementary School. I am glad you taught us about bullying. We know now how to stand up to bullies. I love Character Counts because it helps me in life. It's taught me no matter how small you are, you can do big things.

In Character Counts there are 6 pillars. So far this year I have learned about respect and caring. I learned in class this year that looking someone in the eye when talking to them is a form of respect. I also learned that when meeting someone for the first time it's a form of respect to shake their hand.

I learned in class this year that caring is the opposite of bullying. Caring is when you are kind and when you are sweet to people. You also have their feelings in mind.

My parents have taught me the pillars of Character Counts also. It's good to have parents to teach you how you should act in life. Sometimes, I don't always remember everything they tell me though. That is why Character Counts is nice because I can be reminded of what they have taught me. Thank you for teaching us Character Counts this year.

2nd Grade – 3rd Place

I like Character Counts because you are helping me make good choices and be a better person. You helped me understand caring and fairness. I learned never be a bully. If I am kind and caring it makes me happy and others happy. Spread the happiness not the mean bullying. You helped me learn about fairness.

Cheaters cheat themselves. If you cheat you are keeping yourself from learning and it's not fair to others who have worked hard. Character Counts is helping kids be better kids so they can be better grown-ups. Thank you for being my Character Counts coaches.

3rd Grade – 1st Place

You are a fantastic Character Counts! Coach. Every lesson you teach is important to me. Character Counts! is about six pillars of character. The six pillars are Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship. From all of your lessons the meaning of Fairness and Trustworthiness stand out to me.

Your lesson on Fairness was very important to me. You made this lesson meaningful to my life when you told me the story about Fairness. The story was about a man who worked on a farm and planted a lot of grains. People came over and asked for some of his grain but he said "No" to everyone, and in the middle of the night he died. The lesson I learned from you about this story was that bad things could happen to you when you are not fair or don't share. This reminds me of the time that I would not share my bike with my brother even though I was not riding it because then another day I asked if I could ride his bike and he said "No." I will continue to use this lesson to better my life by always sharing and being fair with every one.

When you taught about trustworthiness it had a positive impact on my life. I learned about trustworthiness when you told us a story about telling the truth. The story you told us about a little girl who had homework and she had to write a poem but she needed help with it. She asked her grandfather who loved poetry when he was in school so instead of helping her he wrote the poem himself. The girl went to school and turned it in without saying that it was not her own work. This story reminded me of when my brother told me some answers to my homework but when

I turned it in, I said that “I did it, but my brother did tell me some answers.” I will continue to use this lesson in my life by always telling the truth.

Miss Rebecca, thank you for coming to my classroom each week. The time you spend with my classmates and me is so nice. I love having you as my Character Counts! coach.

3rd Grade – 2nd Place

The six pillars of Character Counts! are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. These pillars help me to make better choices and live to be a good person. I like Character Counts! because I learn to be a fair, trustworthy, respectful, responsible person. The six pillars are very important in life.

The first reason I like Character Counts! is it makes me live to be a good person. I learn about caring in Character Counts! You taught me to care about others and in return others will care about me. Caring for others and myself is important. You taught me that I should have self-confidence in everything I do. You even read us a poem about never giving up. It is important that I care about myself so I can succeed. I also care for my friends. I help them whenever they need a friend. I try to bring out the best in my friends.

I also like Character Counts! because I learn about each of the six pillars. I know one of the six pillars is fairness. Being fair is important. An example of how I show fairness is never cheating on tests, activities, or games. Being fair to others and myself is important. I know one of the other pillars is respect. Being respectful is very important because if you respect others they will respect you. You taught us showing respect in and out of school is important. Treat others the way you want to be treated.

Last, I like Character Counts! because I like doing things with you. You are a great Character Counts! coach! You make lessons fun. I get to play games during lessons that help me learn about the six pillars. I get to pick a strip of paper that has a question about what we are learning. Then our class talks about different answers to the question. This teaches us to be respectful to our classmates. We also learn about current events and special holidays. We got to read Martin Luther King Jr.’s I have a dream speech. He was a great example of why we should respect others. We learn life lessons during our lessons.

There are many reasons why I like Character Counts! These are just a few. Character Counts! teaches me many important things! Thank you for teaching me about character. I am becoming a better person through Character Counts!

3rd Grade – 3rd Place

Thank you for teaching me about the pillars of Character Counts. Although there are 6 pillars there are two that stood out for me. The two pillars that I have enjoyed learning about is caring and respect. In your lessons you taught me how to settle my problems peacefully. You also taught me that caring is how people make friends because character makes people who they are therefore encourages people to want to be friends with you. For example having a mean attitude can stop someone from making any friends. People do not want a friend who is mean all the time. Since, I want friends I have discovered how important being nice to others is as a friend. In fact, respect plays a **Big** part in being a good friend, just like it did on the video you showed called And Bully. Since the ant bully did not have respect for the ants they did not get along. I do not want to be like ant bully. I am trying really hard to demonstrate respect for all my friends and others too so that I can have more friends.

So why do I like character counts? I like character counts because you represent the type of character I am trying to be. You take time out of your schedule to teach us about the pillars of character counts and you talk to us in a way that we really understand the lesson. In fact, sometimes when you are talking it is like you are talking right to me. Thanks for being the best character counts coach.

4th Grade – 1st Place

I like Character Counts because it guides you through life. I have learned so much from you. I think your lessons are the best. To me the most important pillars are respect and trustworthiness. They will help me become a better person by reminding me to do the right thing all the time.

Respect is important because it pretty much covers all of the pillars. Respect means treating other people like you would treat yourself. Some wonderful Character Counts lessons that go along with respect are, "Count Your Blessings," "What May I Do For You," "If You Can't Be Kind Be Quiet," "Manners Matters," "Never Steal and Always Tell The Truth," and "Don't Be A Bully." I am respectful by listening to others when they speak. I also respect other people's opinion

because they have right to think what they believe in. Respect is really an important pillar.

Trustworthiness means people can rely on you because you are honest. I like the Character Counts story about the King and The Seeds. The King had given all the men in the kingdom seeds to plant trees. The person who grew the best tree would be the new king since the King did not have any sons. All of the men except one brought beautiful trees to the King. The man who returned the seeds in the same way the King had given them to him became the next king because he showed he could be trusted. Instead of replacing the dead sees, the one man was honest with the King and said that although he had tried his best, the seeds had not grown. This lesson taught me always be honest and keep my promises.

You did a great job teaching us these lessons. They will help me be successful. Thank you so much.

4th Grade – 2nd Place

Thank you for teaching me about “Character Counts Pillars.” You helped me understand more about responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, respect and citizenship. The ones you have helped me understand the best are caring, respect and trustworthiness.

Caring is when you take care of someone or something. For example, my mom took care of me when I was sick. Also, when my oldest brother was sick I saw that he didn’t look well so I told our mom and dad. One way you showed me caring is you come in each and every week to teach us about character counts.

Trustworthiness is when you show someone you can be trusted. For example, my mom trusted me to go to Millington Pizza without dropping her food. People will only ask you to do things if they think you are trustworthy. One way you showed me trustworthiness is the lesson you taught us on telling the truth. For example when you started out the lesson by telling us something that wasn’t true and we learned what it felt like to be lied to.

Respect is when you show consideration for someone. One way you taught me respect is when you told us to shake hands with a firm grip and look each other in the eye. For example, I treat others the way I want to be treated. Also, I speak to my parents and teachers with respect.

Thank you for teaching me about the six pillars of character. I look forward to having you come each week. I hope you can teach me more about character counts and the six pillars of character.

4th Grade – 3rd Place

I have learned a lot about the six pillars of Character Counts this year. I'm glad you are my Character Counts coach. The six pillars are Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship, but Caring and Responsibility are my favorite. They are my favorite because they are the two pillars that describe me the best.

I have learned from you that to be a good responsible person, you listen and do what you are told. I always do what I am told. I do my chores when I get home from school. I help out with dinner when my mom gets home. When I had a plant in my room, I kept it in the sun, and watered it every day. I am not only responsible for myself, but also for those around me. I help my babysitter, Heather, by being responsible for the others in the household when she gets busy.

I have also learned about Caring. To be a caring person, you can help out with your mom by giving your siblings a bath, or make them feel better when they are sad. Also, you can help a friend if they are hurt. Another thing is to care about neighbors. You can do things for them, too. One time I helped a neighbor out by watering her plants, and a couple of days later, she sent me a thank you card. But, you won't always be rewarded when you go out of your way to care for others. If you really are a caring person, you care for others because you have a desire to do it, and it makes you feel good inside. It always makes me feel good inside to help my friends.

So, even though I have learned a lot about all six pillars of Character Counts, I still like Caring and Responsibility the best, because they represent the things I think are most important. They are the qualities I strive to achieve in order to be a good friend to all.

5th Grade – 1st Place

Thank you for teaching me about character counts. Character counts teaches me something new every day.

The concept of character counts is to teach everyone to be a good person. The six pillars are, respect, responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, fairness and citizenship. I try to follow these every day in school or at home.

I always think of ways to be of good character. Whether it's by helping others or being a good role model for my younger sister. Whenever my two sisters fight I try and stop them before one of them really starts to get their feelings hurt.

Two pillars that are important to me are citizenship and trustworthiness. Whenever I go to girl scouts we try to show the church hall that we can be trusted. We have to be responsible and pick up after everything we do. Also my neighbors have cats; whenever they go away on a trip I watch them. Our neighbors try to give me treats or little souvenirs, but I say no thank you; they give it to me anyway. So they show character too.

Did you know that I was invited to be on the radio? My school nominated me because they thought I demonstrated the pillars of character. I learned that from you. I enjoy you as my coach.

Some people that I know that demonstrate good character are my teachers. They always make sure that we are treated fairly. When my class had to share projects my teacher Mr. Jachimowicz says a compliment, like "very good", "that's great". I think that's very kind. My parents also demonstrate good character. They are caring, they care for my sisters and me. My father kind of spoils me. Whenever I need help cutting my food, my parents help me with it. Also my parents help with my homework when I'm having trouble with it. When I'm sick my dad or mom offers to stay home and take care of me. Another way is, all three of my sisters want to play sports, so my parents take us to practice and watch us play.

The character counts program has changed me. It taught me to be nice to my sisters and not bicker and fight. I really try not to hurt their feelings when fighting. And I apologize to my sisters. I hope someday character counts will make the world a better place. Haven't you ever watched the news and everything is crimes and murder? My wish in character counts is one day let all the terrible things slip away and have a good day. Smile and greet everyone with a "Hello or how are you". I remember we went over that lesson, you greet us every day.

I've had several coaches. Each coach has taught me something important about being a good person. I enjoy every minute talking with you about character counts. Thank you for being my coach, even though you don't have to, you chose to be caring and teach us about life. You could get far in life if you just smile.

5th Grade – 2nd Place

Character Counts is about being a good person to look up to and admire. That person knows the difference between right and wrong. Also, that person tries to do the right thing even when the right thing is not easy. Someone who is a Character Counts person sets a good example for everyone. Three people in my life who are Character Counts people are my friend Taiyana, my grandmother, and my cousin Malik.

My friend Taiyana helps a lot of people. She cares about others and she listens to everybody that needs help. One day, Taiyana helped me with school problems and she helped me solve the problem without my getting in trouble. Also, she helped me with a dance for church so I could do the dance in my church. Taiyana is a very good friend. Taiyana also helps her mother and father with her brothers too, and she helps her team when she is playing sports. I have a lot of friends, but nobody is as caring as Taiyana, who loves to try to do the right thing.

Another person that I know is a Character Counts person is my grandmother. My grandmother is caring, respectful, and trustworthy. She is trustworthy because she is always honest and does not lie because if she lies, she knows things will get worse. Additionally, we would not trust her anymore and she would not want to be the lady that lies to people. My grandmother is respectful because her mother told her if she was not respectful back in the day then something bad will happen. My grandmother did not want anything bad to happen to her or her family back then or now. My grandmother has been respectful ever since she was a little girl. She is also caring because if somebody gets hurt and she is going somewhere, she will stop everything and help that person. When I was a kid I stepped on a nail and she made it all better. She helped me walk again because when I stepped on the nail I could not walk for a while. My grandmother always tells the truth and she told me to always tell the truth because you never know what will happen.

The third person in my life who teaches me to live my life by the pillars of Character Count is my cousin Malik, who has Down Syndrome, and who a lot of people help. When I was eight years old I helped Malik with a lot of things. I helped him to talk, draw, and say his name. Even today, I help him with a lot of things. Now, Malik is nine years old and I am twelve years old. Malik can do a lot more things than he could not do back then. Malik can do a lot of things people think he cannot do because of the help people have given him. Malik is a smart little boy, he may be deaf in one ear, but he is actually very smart. Malik helps his little brother sometimes too. Through my helping Malik, I have learned what is really important

in life and how to be a person of good character. We thank God for letting Malik live.

If it was not for God, Character Counts would not be in this world today. Character Counts is teachers, kids and lots more people being all the six pillars is the world. Character Counts is the best thing in the world because people would not be nice to each other all the time, and I know that nobody is perfect in this world. The pillars of good character are very important, so I thank God for making this world so we can be people of good Character Counts today and for the rest of our lives.

5th Grade – 3rd Place

The two most important Character Counts! traits to me are trustworthiness and caring. Trustworthiness means that I can trust my friends, parents, doctors, etc. Caring means that people care about you and that means a lot to me. These traits mean more to me this year.

My Character Counts! coach, Pastor Kelley, discusses the values of having trustworthiness and caring in our society. In countries like India, Buddhism is a primary part of their culture, they believe that people have their place in life, be it good or bad, rich or poor, because of the person's prior life. For this reason the Indian culture generally believes that we should not care or show caring ways to the poor and homeless. Pastor Kelley made us aware of how caring can make a difference in someone's life with a story about a family in a restaurant. The family was sitting down to dinner and at a nearby table, the son was making loud rude noises. The family that was hearing the noises coming from the nearby table was asked to be moved, as to not be interrupted any more. The family, moments later, could still hear the boy and complained to the waiter. The waiter knew the family with the loud child, and politely explained to the family that was bothered by the noise he could say something to the family, but he wanted to make clear that the child had Tourettes syndrome and was not making the noises on purpose. When the family that was being interrupted heard that, their compassion overtook their bothered attitude, and they were fine for the rest of the dinner. The waiter cared enough about the family to defend them, and let them enjoy their meal.

I believe that Pastor Kelley is good at educating my class about how important it is to have trustworthy and caring people in our society. He made it clear to us that without these pillars in our country or the world it would be a horrible place. The two values may be important to Pastor Kelley because he is a pastor; Christian foundation is about being a trustworthy and caring person too.

In conclusion, I believe without caring and trustworthy people Kent County would not be what it is today. I would not be able to go outside and play if I didn't trust that my parents and neighbors cared enough about my safety. We could not buy fresh milk or produce if we did not trust that our farmers cared enough about their crops and animals to ensure that their products were safe. For these reasons and many others I value caring and trustworthiness as more than just good character count traits because Pastor Kelley has demonstrated how important these traits are in everyday life.

Middle Schools

6th Grade – 1st Place

I'll always remember the saying, "Treat people the way you want to be treated" because it's a combination of my favorite pillars, respect and citizenship. I first heard this quote in Character Counts but now I hear it everyday in my life all the time. A good citizen to me is someone who is polite, helps the community, and is a respectful person. A respectful person is someone who has manners and is kind to their peers. Character Counts helps me become a better person towards my parents, family, friends and teachers, and to have more respect to the people around me.

Citizenship is one of my favorite pillars because it's challenging. In my opinion, to be a good citizen you must help out your community by picking up trash or help anyone that needs help that is around you. Also, to be a good citizen you must follow the rules at home and at school. Citizenship is a hard pillar to be because you have to make time for it. It requires you to give up your own personal time in order to do good for others and your country. You must work hard if you want to be a good citizen, which takes dedication and sacrifice.

I also like the pillar respect because not many people have respect for others like they should. To me, in order to be respectful you must respect your family, friends, and teachers by not talking back and speaking in a respectful tone. This may sometimes seem hard when you are angry or upset with someone; however, it is important to keep in mind that these people are trying to help you, so you should return the favor and be respectful back. Also, you must be very nice and talk in a polite manner even to people you don't know. It is considerate to the people around you and improves your reputation. I have used respect in school because I talk in a polite manner and don't talk back. I listen to my teachers.

As you can see, Character Counts is good for people who are rude and disrespectful because it helps people become more respectful and a better citizen. Character Counts is not for the teacher, it is for you! It helps you to be a nicer person and helps you to be better, not for them, but for yourself.

6th Grade – 2nd Place

There are six Character Counts pillars that are taught and have helped people in many different ways. During this essay I will talk about the three Character Counts pillars that mean the most to me. In the first paragraph I will talk about caring, the second paragraph I will talk about respect and the third paragraph I will talk about responsibility. I picked these because these are the pillars I relate to the most. I have had to deal with many of my friends fighting with me and each other for several years. The three pillars I picked really have so much to do with friendship, fighting and bullying, so if we could follow these pillars we could prevent some of this from happening.

The first Character Counts pillar I will talk about is caring. Caring is the way you show kindness and concerns for others, such as helping someone who is sick or elderly. There are so many ways that you can show someone you care, but I will tell you about some of the ways I like the most. First, to show someone you care, you can help them. For instance, if somebody knocks the books out of someone's hands, you should stop and help them or if someone falls down, you should ask if they are okay and help them up. Another way to show you care is that you can make gifts or get gifts for others that do not have that much. Those are all things that I have done with my Girl Scout troop, here at school and with my Sunday school. It makes me feel good to know that I helped make someone's day a little brighter with just a small gesture. You can also show your whole community that you care by helping to clean up a park or a road. The sky is the limit with acts of kindness.

The next Character Counts pillar I will talk about respect. Respect is showing someone you care and admire them. There would be a lot less fighting and bullying if we followed this because people would treat each other more kindly and be more accepting of each other. If you follow this pillar you would hopefully be able to have more friends. They would know that you like them and don't want to fight with them and that you would be a good friend to them. Showing a person that you respect them means that you watch what you say to them. You want to be a good influence to people and respect yourself, as well, so that you can have a good reputation at home or at school. All people, young and old should be shown respect; we all deserve to be treated with respect.

The last Character Counts pillar I will discuss is responsibility. Responsibility is being held accountable for a chore or an action that may be good or bad, such as yelling at your parents. If you are a responsible student, teachers will be able to count on you in the classroom for your assignments and good behavior. If you can show you are responsible, people will be able to trust you. Your parents should be able to count on you at home to do your chores, homework and show good judgment for your actions. Your friends also should be able to count on you. For example, if they tell you something, they should know you won't tell the whole school or class. You can only be responsible for your own behavior and yourself, but hopefully you want to be a better person that is dependable and responsible.

I hope that we can all use these pillars in some way every day. If we could follow even one of the Character Counts pillars, just think of what a difference it might make in someone else's life, along with your own.

6th Grade – 3rd Place

The first time I learned about Character Counts I saw a black snake crawling outside and my uncle let it crawl away. I learned to respect and care about nature. Character Counts has taught me to respect myself, other people, and things of nature. Character Counts helps improve our schools and communities because we learn how to work together and respect each other. I think respect is good for everyone.

I have 2 dogs and 10 cats. I care about my dogs and cats by feeding them, washing them, petting them, and letting them inside so they don't get cold at night. I think Character Counts plays a big part in taking care of animals. You have to care about them, treat them with kindness, respect, and love. I think if anyone is willing to take care of an animal they have to be responsible enough. I have a lot of family members and I love and care about all of them. I am grateful to have the family that I have. Character Counts has helped me to remember the 6 pillars so I never forget them. Character Counts also helps me take care of my stuff so it stays in good shape when I get older.

Character Counts has helped me to remember to care about others too. For example, poor people need clothes, money, food, dish wear, towels, and soap. I love to help those people out. If you're caring and responsible good things will come out of that. It's very important to be caring to others and responsible with pets, your stuff, and even if you have children they need a lot of attention and care. Being responsible is one thing that helps EVERYONE! I think that everyone needs to

respect everyone. Treat people the way you want to be treated. Respect, kindness, saying hello, helping out, and being caring to others is very important in everyday life. I think that everybody should be respectful and keep in mind the children from Sandy Hook Elementary, what those children went through, and how its going to scare them for life. Let us not forget the children and teachers that had bravery and courage on December 4th, 2012. I think everyone should respect and care for all of the Sandy Hook victims may they all rest in peace.

Character Counts has helped me a lot in life. It helps me be caring, respectful, trustworthy, fair to everyone, responsible, and a good citizen. I am very thankful for the life I have because of my family. They all love and care about me and I love and care about them too. My dad always told me to respect and care about my elders and good things would come out of that, a family that respects and loves me back. Every time I write the Character Counts essays I wonder... what would the world be like without Character Counts?

7th Grade – 1st Place

When I think of Character Counts!
And what it means to me.
I think about the six pillars.
And what student I should be.

The first pillar is trustworthiness.
Being able to believe in a friend.
And being honest in all we do.
Telling the truth from start to end.

Respect is the next pillar,
That we should show at our school.
By honoring our elders and others,
And by following the golden rule.

Responsibility is the third pillar.
Being accountable for all you do.
And proving to other people,
That they can rely on you.

The fourth pillar is fairness.
Treating everyone, all the same way.
Being kind to those you meet.
And being a good sport when you play.

Caring is the fifth pillar.
Showing love to all around.
Helping an old person cross the street.
Or taking care of a puppy you found.

The final pillar is citizenship.
Being active in my world every day.
Voting, recycling and learning our laws,
Participating in the S.G.A.

These pillars or values I am taught everyday.
From my parent and my teachers around me.
I know that Character Counts! in every way
In making me the best person I can be.

7th Grade – 2nd Place

Trustworthiness, respectfulness, caring, citizenship, responsibility, and fairness, the six pillars of Character Counts all mean a lot to me. The one that means the most to me is caring. It means a lot to be caring, not just toward your parents and friends but you need to be caring toward everyone and the community. When you are young and caring you are more likely you will have a brighter future.

My mother always taught me to care about others and to be polite to others. She told me that saying please and thank you is part of being caring toward others because if you don't do those things then you seem like you don't care and you don't appreciate the things people are doing for you. People will come across you as rude and unappreciative. Also my grandparents had a large impact on why caring about others means so much to me. Over the summer my family was in a tight situation so I have spent a lot of time there. One day when I was there, my Poppop and I were walking into the market and he spotted a man that was older than he was and that was having trouble crossing the street to the parking lot. Even though he was in a hurry, he helped the man cross the street and helped him put his groceries away. The man responded by saying "thank you so much and you didn't have to do that". "I didn't have to but I wanted to" my Poppop said. After that they talked about small things like the weather and the ball game. He came back to me and told me that if I do things like that then it makes one more person in the world happy and that matters. He does things like that every single day and he teaches me to care about my community and they will care about you and that is true. That is true because my grandmother has a hard time getting around and has to use a cane. She said that

when she went to pick up a carry out dinner, the man at the counter brought the food out to her car so she wouldn't have to get out and walk up the steps. Things like that really make her happy and that makes me happy.

They both care about their community and their friends and family and their community care about them. They do a lot for my family and that shows they care. I care about them a lot and try to do things around the house that help them like taking the trash out and watering the garden but that doesn't compare to what they do for everyone around them. After I have visited them a lot it made me realize that everyday I need to do things like them and I realized what my mom is doing for the family and I need to do more things for her. I need to give back to my community and help people even if I do not know them. My grandparents changed how I look at myself and how I look at my community.

7th Grade – 3rd Place

"Gramps" Joey said "I learned something today"
"Well, that's great, but what do you have to say?"
"I learned about six pillars responsibility was one"
"Well, that's fantastic! But what is the problem son?"
"I need to know which is most important to me."
"I can understand, but how to explain it, let me see,"

"The school was playing capture the flag in gym class
Suddenly a girl tripped, her arm shattered like glass
Fred was nearby and thought he tripped her but it wasn't so
He mopped around all day not even saying hello
Another boy was watching and decided to comfort his friend
He could've yelled at him but imagine what he did instead
As soon as he got home he thought and thought
For this is what he did more often than not
He decided to make a card shaped like a boat,
On it he composed a poem and this is what he wrote:

People may trip and break their arm,
You blame yourself but did no harm,
But just remember what I say to you
You blame yourself but it's not true.

The next day the boy gave his friend the card
Fred cried, then yelled, then began laughing hard

He was so touched that he didn't know how to act
So he just hugged his new best friend, that is a fact"

"Fred's friend was being caring" The granddad tried to explain
"And that is the best characteristic you could ever hope to gain.
For being caring makes everyone around you feel good.
It will start you off on the road to brotherhood."

8th Grade – 1st Place

Character counts is very important to me. I am very fortunate to come from a Christian family and go to a Christian school where good character is taught and demonstrated. I learned good character at a young age, and it has really helped me throughout my life. I am thankful for the people who have taught me good character. Good character will help you be a better person. It can also help you be successful in life.

All of the character traits are important, but I think one of the most important traits is respect. I think everyone should learn to be respectful to others. Respect is becoming very rare in kids and teens. If we compared the kids and teens today, to the kids and teens in the “good old days,” I think we would be embarrassed and ashamed. I am glad my parents enforce respect in my life. Having respect will take you places in life.

I believe caring is also a very important character trait to have. When you care about someone, it not only makes them feel good, but it makes you feel good as well. As a Christian, being kind and caring for others is a way I am able to share the love of God with them. Some people do kind things for other people just for recognition, but we should all care for others just from the love of our hearts, whether we receive recognition or not. Some people believe that people of a lower degree than them do not deserve kindness, but they do. Everyone, whether rich or poor, deserves someone to love them. Even if they do not have a human to love and care for them, God will always care for them. You would probably shock someone by performing a good deed.

Responsibility is another character trait that is not as “popular” as it should be. If everyone learns responsibility, I believe our country would be a better place. A lack of responsibility not only affects you, but it affects others. Responsibility not only includes a good work ethic, but it includes taking responsibility for your actions. People today need to realize that when they do something wrong, they need to take responsibility for their actions and not blame others for their wrong doings.

Trustworthiness is also a very important character trait to have. When you look for a friend, you want someone who you can trust with anything and who is honest. Trustworthiness is key in life. For example, when you are applying for a job, your boss or manager will want someone whom they can trust. If you prove yourself trustworthy, life will be a little easier. You will receive more privileges and opportunities in life. When you know someone can trust you with something, it makes their life easier, and it makes you feel good inside.

Being fair is a very important trait to have when it comes to many different things. We often hear the phrase, “Well, life is not fair.” Then it is our job to make it as fair as we can. When I think of being fair, I think of little kids playing a game, and someone does not play by the rules. Being fair does not just pertain to little kids, but it pertains to everyone. For example, you would not want a cashier to hand you less change than what you actually should receive, would you? That is why we need to be fair to others as well.

The last trait is citizenship. This trait is also important to have. When you have good citizenship, you show how much you want to be involved in your community. It is great to want to make your community a better place. God created the place we live in, so it is our duty to take care of it, and thank Him for it. You can be a good citizen by cleaning up trash, or helping people in your community. The other day my dad had my sister and I clean up the trash on the side of our street and in the ditches. It made me feel good after I was finished.

Again, good character is very important to me. It should also be important to the rest of the world. I think the world would be a better place if we applied good character. Someone actually asked me a few months ago what was something I never wanted to change about myself, and I said my character. I am glad that I was taught good character. God has blessed me greatly. He has put wonderful role models all around me to give examples of good character.

8th Grade – 2nd Place

There once was a boy named Lee,
Who needed some money you see;
So he went to his neighbors and asked them to pay him for anything he could do for
a fee.

“Well Lee,” Said Ms. Ike,
I have something you may like,

It would really be great if you came over late and baby-sat our son, Mike.
If you do this for us Lee, I'll be grateful and full of glee and I'll give you some money,
Oh yes, a twenty”!

“Of Course! I would love to!” Said Lee,
“No doubt, Ms. Ike you can trust me!”
So he pranced on over to 201, South Clover,
And got ready for his big job, happily.

“Well I must be going Lee,
Do a good job and you'll get your twenty.
Make sure Mike gets in no trouble and doesn't fall nor tumble and you are sure to get your money.”

“Say goodbye to mommy!” Said Lee to Mike,
But then Mike said, “I WANNA RIDE ON MY TRIKE!”
After this statement Lee was nervous and sparked, he responded sternly with the remark, “A trike a trike? What do you mean a trike! If you fall off, well, you might fall on a spike! Just don't do it, please, don't do it! I want my twenty, Mike!”

“I WANT MY TRIKE, I WANT MY TRIKE, I WANT MY TRIKE!” Said Mike,
Lee responded in spite, He said, “NO TRIKE ITS NINE AT NIGHT, IF YOU FALL OFF IT WILL CAUSE YOUR MOTHER A FRIGHT, AND PLEASE OH PLEASE CEASE TO FIGHT BECAUSE YOU AREN'T GOING TO RIDE THAT TRIKE!”

After hours and hours of words to and fro, Lee decided he was going to go, “Ok who cares, you can ride your trike, ride your trike as much as you like,” and with that Lee let go little Mike, Let him go off to play, play out of sight.

A little bit later Lee heard a scream and almost instantly his happy glow ceased to gleam. He ran round the house to where it came from, or at least where it seemed, and he saw little Mike on the ground with a scraped knee. “Oh no I let him tumble even though Ms. Ike warned me!” So Lee kissed goodbye to his coveted twenty. He underestimated the little boy's agility, and also learned a valuable lesson about responsibility.

8th Grade – 3rd Place

What is the normal routine day for a teenager? Wake up, eat breakfast, dress, school, possibly after school activity, home, dinner, then (sometimes our favorite part) bed. That's how most people see it anyways. Well, I'm not most people. Although I do everything I have listed, I think of how I can make everyday a T.R.R.F.C.C day. That meaning Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship.

I make sure that my friends and anyone who really needs somebody to confide in, always knows that I'm always able to talk to them. I would never want anyone bottling up feelings inside, and one day they completely snap, all because they didn't have anyone they felt they could trust. I am a very trustworthy person who would never tell anyone something if they felt that something has to be kept confidential. I'm also one to take my own advice. I trust all of my close friends with anything I don't feel comfortable keeping to myself; I know they are always there for me. If you are able to trust and be trusted, you feel loved which makes the whole day better.

I'm in middle school. Those four words seem to tell people "I have no respect for anyone in my presence". For some kids, like me, this is not true. At home and school, although I may tease them, I have total respect for my family and friends. I am never rude to the point where I can see that it is actually bothering them. There is a line that is not meant to be crossed. When people are volunteers to help out at school, you will never see me talking or doing anything that could possibly disrespect them. If people have respect in their lives, it will be so much easier to learn and have people who stay in your life to help you out along the way.

If there is one character pillar that sums up mine and many people I know in my life, it is probably responsibility. Every night during the week, I have something I am responsible for, not including the homework I get. I am also in one of the special programs in my school, meaning I'm taking high school courses in 8th grade. I didn't just get in though. I work my butt off to get straight A's every term. I also have summer projects that are required for the program. The reason I take on all this responsibility is because I know it will take me places later in life, that's one thing that drives me everyday.

When people think of fairness, what they think of is board games and sports. You may not think sports are that serious, but look at Lance Armstrong, a famous cyclist who won several races. He was caught using a performance enhancement drugs on his body. Because he didn't want to race fair, he lost most of his sponsors, stepped down as chairman of *Livestrong* (his foundation for cancer), and his eight

Olympic gold medals. He isn't a true winner, winning takes true effort. If your not putting effort into something, you are probably cheating, meaning you aren't being fair. It is so rewarding when you have something and think, because of my effort to do this, I have something to be proud of. That is the true bliss of fairness.

Have you ever heard the saying, "The small things you do for someone makes the biggest difference in their life?" Well, that's the definition of caring to me. Just being able to open a door, pick something up, or sometimes even saying 'hi' to someone, brightens their whole day. There are also big things you can do to be caring. You can volunteer at the animal shelter, visit hospital patients, or donating to a charity, it always makes not just the person your helping out, but also yourself feel really good because you know, you made someone's day. That is the most rewarding feeling anyone can have to brighten their day.

How can you show a person citizenship? It is as easy as being friendly to a new child in school. Just imagine if you were a new student. It is a very scary situation. It's like learning who you are all over again. Wondering which group is the right one for you. When someone makes a gesture for you, it reassures you that you will be fine in your new school. By being a good citizen, not only will you have a good day, but you showed someone else that they are welcome to be your friend.

This is how I spend a large majority of my day. Nowadays there aren't many people like me that care a whole lot about other people, but that doesn't mean there are none. If I use all of the pillars everyday, I know that not only me, but everyone around me has a T.R.R.F.C.C day everyday.

The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed

-Carl Jung

High Schools

9th Grade – 1st Place

On January 17, 1998, my birth mom, Christina, and birth dad, James, made the decision to put me up for adoption. This is an example of responsibility and caring. They knew doing this was the only way for me to have the life they would want me to have. Also, it made my current mom and dad extremely happy to have the opportunity to adopt a new baby girl since they couldn't have children themselves. My families and I know that their decisions were the most responsible and caring thing they could have ever done for me.

It's very hard for many people to understand that I wasn't put up for adoption because I wasn't wanted or wasn't loved, but because I was loved, and it was the best thing for me. My birth parents were both teenagers when they had me and had already had my sister, Samantha, who had been living with her grandmother since she was born. They had the responsibility to face the fact that even if my adoption was open, they might never see me again, and I might never meet my sister, or any of my biological family. Before I could even understand adoption, my parents would read me stories about it and explain to me about the situation. Eventually everything was clear to me and I realized the responsibility it took to for my parents to tell me everything.

When I was about 7 I decided that I didn't want to go through my life not meeting my birth parents so I told my parents and they planned a trip to Disney World, which was close to where they lived. As the time got closer, I got more and more excited to meet my Samantha and Christina, but I was disappointed that I couldn't meet James since they had been separated since I was young. When the time arrived, we were standing in the park and I saw a girl who looked just like me and a woman with her. I realized that it was my sister, and birth-mom. That day was the best day I could ever wish for and ever since that day, I talk to my sister everyday and every summer we visit each other, and my family respects that.

About one and a half years ago I decided that I was responsible enough to locate and contact James. Eventually, my sister helped me and talked to him about me coming to his house with her to meet him because she knew how much I cared about this. My parents sat down with me and had to explain that this was a huge responsibility since he had never met me and never made an effort to contact me or see me. I knew that me visiting him might now be what I expected. During the trip, I realized how much he really cared about me and how much he had actually wanted to be a part of my life. Since the visit was around Christmas, he had presents under the tree for me, which made me realize that he did care about me. He also had a full photo book of pictures of me that he had received throughout the years and baby pictures he had of me. Seeing all of the pictures made me realize I was more important to him than I thought, and he loved me. Every night he would tell me how he had waited for the day he could finally meet me and how he loved me. The most responsible thing and caring thing he did during that trip was explain to me why he wanted me to be put up for adoption. He explained how he didn't do the right things as a kid, and didn't want me to be around the type of stuff he did, but he reminded me that he has always cared about me and only wanted the best for me.

My families allowing me to have these opportunities show how much they care about my life. If my parents didn't care about my happiness, I'm sure they would have never let me become close with my biological family. Thanks to them, my birth family and my parents honestly mean so much to me and I'm so happy they care about me as much as I care about them. Whenever I am going through rough times, I know I can count on them, especially Samantha, to be there for me and show that they care. James also calls me periodically to talk to me and see how I am doing. Their caring towards me makes me feel so good about myself and I am very thankful.

To me, my family shows the most responsibility and caring that I have ever seen. They care so much about me, and they accept me for who I am. Also, they show so much responsibility in our situations and they know that the decisions they made 15 years ago were the best thing they could have ever done for me. In my opinion, I have never seen a family who shows as much character counts as mine does, and I am very thankful for that. Without them, I would not be such a respectful woman and I would not be as caring as I am now. Also, if it wasn't for adoption, I wouldn't understand the responsibility it takes, and to me, Character Counts would not mean as much as it does to me now.

9th Grade – 2nd Place

One day in the seventh grade I was at my locker when I got pushed from behind. I was very startled and confused about who it might be and why. I turned around and saw someone standing there waving at me. I remembered him from the special education class when my mom substituted. I waved back and he quickly ran away. From that day on I have seen him everyday in school. The bond that we have formed displays all of the pillars of character, but respect and caring have the most significance to me.

When I first met him I did not see much wrong with him, but once I got to know him I found that he was nonverbal. Many days it is an obstacle when trying to communicate, yet other times it is a piece of cake. Spending lots of time with him takes a lot of patience even when you might not know what he wants or why he is acting up. I have learned his different signals, and noises, and know what they mean at different times. I have to care for his feelings and take care of him to the best of my ability. Since I have been friends with him some of my friends and other people have also befriended him. Even though they also see him often I still have to interpret for him. It takes a lot of care to be his friend, but it is worth it.

I have learned so much from my friend over the past few years. He is a very dedicated person who displays true friendship and respect. He has made me cards

for various occasions and even given me a present that was meant for Mother's Day. He learns my daily schedule and will wait or even leave his class so he can see me. Because of this friendship I have an interest in becoming a special education teacher and have made friends with others in his class. I also participated in Unified tennis in the fall. This is where people pair up with students who have special needs. By participating in this I got to see how different people cared and interacted at other schools. It was a real experience that showed lots of care especially in different places.

Sometimes I run across people who like to mock or pick on my friend. Since he rocks back and forth when he walks people will imitate what he does and then laugh at it. I have had to explain multiple times how he cannot help it and how it is rude and hurtful to watch people mock him. It is hard sometimes to stick up for him, but it makes you feel good when you can care and help someone. It is great to see that I am not the only person there to help him. Others have also befriended him and showed tremendous amounts of care towards him. It is great to see that people respect and care for him more than people are rude or ignorant towards him.

I have learned so much from my friend and enjoy seeing him day by day and how he interacts with everyone and everything. There is lots of respect that people show towards him and lots of care that people have for him and he has for people. He is an inspiration to me and is a great friend. I hope that people continue to be kind to him and continue to try to be his friend. Respect and caring are very important and very great to have.

9th Grade – 3rd Place

Playing sports can teach you a lot, not only about the sport, but about character. I have played lacrosse for my entire life and from it have found that trust, responsibility, and respect are very important on and off the field. My coaches and teammates have taught me lessons that I will remember for the rest of my life.

The entire team has to trust each other but between each string of each position that trust has to be even stronger. I play defense and if the trust between me and my other two defenders broke we would crumble apart on each play. If you have ever watched a lacrosse game it can get very chaotic with offensive players cutting and dodging with the goal of confusing and disorienting the defense. I have to trust my teammates to watch their guy and be able to back me up at any time no matter what just like they trust me to do the same for them. Our goalie trusts us not to let the other team get danger close or go I on I with him. But there is no way we

can stop them from taking any shots which means we have to trust our goalie to always be alert and ready to stop a shot.

We are responsible as athletes and teammates to take care of ourselves; stay in shape, and constantly work to make ourselves better on and off the field. The job doesn't end when practice is over or when the final whistle blows in a game. We have to work every second of the day not only physically but also in school because if our grades fall then we can't play and we have let down the entire team. Nobody can watch us every second of everyday which means that we have to be responsible for ourselves. Taking the easy road usually results in poor performance on the field. Respect is another important part of lacrosse. If you don't respect your teammates that results in a lack of trust and ends in a downward spiral. Our coaches have our respect because without them we wouldn't be a team and they spend a lot of time helping us and figuring out what to do to make us better. We respect them by working as hard as we can at practice and games and also listening carefully to everything they tell us. But respect is something that should be shown to the other team as well. To show respect to the other team we dress up for away games to show that we want to look good when arriving at their school. We also show respect for our opponent by shaking hands before and after each game. The refs must be respected because they are there to officiate the game and their calls are final. We must listen to the refs and even if we think they are wrong we have to focus on playing our game.

These are only some of the ways that these pillars are shown throughout a lacrosse team. A good lacrosse team is not only skilled on the field but exemplifies these pillars every day. Character counts helps build lacrosse teams and lacrosse builds character in its players.

10th Grade – 1st Place

"When we treat people merely as they are, they will remain as they are. When we treat them as if they were what they should be, they will become what they should be." You think you know me, I am the first born of my family; I am not from around here. Individuals should not judge people by their appearances. People should judge them by their attitude. People judge me by my looks. Where I was from, Nigeria, people respect each other, so everyone earns respect back. When you respect someone, you make him/her happy.

On my first day of middle school, I met new friends. Most of the students were nice to me, introducing me to other students. One of my friends even asked me to join his soccer team. I respect this friend because I realize now that he was

helping me fit into a new school through playing sports. Once on the team, you have to respect your teammates because without respect in a team, the team is not a team. My teammates respect my culture so most of the time they all want to know about Nigeria, Some of them even ask me how to say some words in my language. They all love my culture some even say I would like to follow you to Nigeria even my teachers sometimes ask me about Africa. I know some people do respect my culture.

I respect anyone I see so they can respect me. Respect is a give and take if you respect others they will also respect you. Sometimes I feel sad because people call me names or talk about my country. They don't respect my culture or where I come from. Sometimes I just feel like punching them in the face but I am a respectful young man, I respect my parents' words.

I think students that don't respect others get this mostly from their parents. Everyday my parents talk to me and my brothers about how bad they are being treated at work, how their workmates disrespect them, how bad they feel. Most parents do not know how their actions and attitudes could influence their children. If parents could respect one another, their children will learn from this and they will respect their classmates.

I respect anyone I meet because of where I come from. In my country, if you do not respect someone older than you or your classmates, they are allowed to beat you. That is why in Nigeria you can never see children talking back to a teacher or their parent. I was surprised my first week of school seeing how children talk back to their teachers. Where I come from we call that disrespect. I do not hang out with disrespectful students. All of my friends are respectful. They don't talk back to teachers or their parents. It would be nice if all students in my high school could act that way.

10th Grade – 2nd Place

The most effective influence in a person's life is a mentor. Family will raise you, friends will critique you, but mentors are who teach you life lessons. My decision-making has been shaped by experiences with such individuals. Such as one who pushes me to care for others by example, or another who pushes me to work hard- also by example. The reason for the success of their influence is teaching by example. Although sometimes, the example is not a positive one...

There was once a Coach who brought both his skill set and ego to a perpetually failing football team. His presence on the team raised everyone's hopes.

"Maybe this year we'll win a game!" -the echoing thought of every member of the team. The win would not come easy; every day of preseason the players left the field without a shred of energy left. But they felt something inside, something big coming along. A storm-like feeling, or maybe that was just the sound of the downpour hammering on their helmets. Maybe the crash of the thunder was actually the crash of helmets on shoulder pads. They didn't pay mind either way. Preseason is over. The test arrives.

First game of the season- jerseys were worn everywhere in the school. No one was paying attention in class. Why would they? Today was "the day". Who could possibly do anything but think about, talk about, and fantasize about the game? The ride was tense. A mix of rubbing stomachs to smash the mass migration of butterflies, hard expressions to mask true feelings, taping up wrists and hands, cracking jokes here and there "You gonoa make a tackle tonight? Or just bitch out?" "What these white boys got on us?" "Couldn't we get a challenge?". The guys warmed up even harder than they practiced. They were ready for whatever storm, hit, or trash was coming. Coming toward the end of the fourth quarter the score was 53-8, bad guys. The team who had worked so hard had but given up, they were playing for pride. Of course, there's not much pride in a score like that; so after a bad tackle both benches cleared. At least they could claim the brawl as theirs.

And so it began. The tension on the team rose. Loss after loss, what could they do? Then the Coach first quit. The next day they see him in the top bleachers at practice. Offering no help, no advice. He comes to the first home game and takes control. But they didn't want to trust him. How could they? And yet, they win the game. The tension lifts, the eye in the storm. Another win after that- the boys were full of ecstasy and pride.

What goes up must come down. A hard loss: 68-8, bad guys. All through school the next day arose a rumor: "He quit again, to hell with him." "No practice today boys." "At least he's true to the couch." There was no practice. More rumors: "He might not come back." "Season's over guys." "Screw it." Two days later he appears once again. How many times would this happen?

Now the season was almost over with only two games left. The first being Homecoming. All week the boys trained- you've got to win the Homecoming game. The game was on Friday. The Coach left on Thursday. For good. Turned in his keys. Friday was the worst weather they had ever seen. Snow, sleet, wind, and rain. The storm had arrived. It was freezing.

Homecoming was when I realized that this wasn't a team. Not a normal one anyway. It was a family. We stuck together all year. While our father had

abandoned us in the freezing rain, leaving us to fend for ourselves, we stuck together and made it through. It occurred to me as we huddled on the sidelines, supporting each other. At one point, the whole team was infected with impetigo. I still have the scars. Everyone was a better person from what happened that season. By the end, we realized who we could really trust- each other. We raised each other, critiqued each other, and there was one that taught us "what not to do"- by example of course.

10th Grade – 3rd Place

Grandmother Faye. August 21, 1932, a bright-eyed baby girl was born into the Crouch family, Maywood Crouch's firstborn child. The year she was born was the worst year in the depression. Maywood had belief and hope in Judith Faye though, she knew that the worst was in the past. Maywood had given birth to two boys and one other girl, after Judith. As a child Judith only had one toy, a doll that she had made with her mother. Due to the hard times, Maywood had to find a job herself to provide what is substantial for a family of six; Judith had to care for her siblings, cook and clean, and she simply had no time for play. Cooking, cleaning and caring for siblings is a great responsibility for a young child during the time period; she had to mentally mature. She was very caring to everyone and anyone she ever met. That Trait is something I wish every individual in society could possess. My grandmother had Character.

Judith was active as a teenager; she also loved to learn about the world and the landscape. She loved painting. She loved sewing. She loved playing the piano. She loved smoking. Ironically, she did not know it would be the cause of her demise. It was culture, considered a "cool" act in her time. Grandmother then met my grandfather when she was young; they settled down in a house that currently is neighboring my own. After courting and dating, they moved down to a lovely little creek "more convenient position for a waterman's family." Judith had two young boys, for which she tenderly cared. For the rest of her years she stayed at home doing what was expected of her in her time, to clean and cook.

One day the family was around the living room, eyes glued to the TV as they announced smoking is cancerous. The boys turned to face their mother as she merely said, "Don't worry boys, I'm fine, I'm not in pain." She felt pain though; it did not stop her from tending to her old frail mother, or her husband and two boys.

Years later, Judith's sons, Jeffery and Barty, had their own children. Jeff had twin girls, and Barty had a boy and a girl, each one to a different woman. Judith was distressed about his irresponsibility. Barty had never learned to care for himself

because another always provided it. Judith and Billy always paid his bills, and looked after his own property when he did not care for it. She was always stressed about some sort of matter regarding Barty. Judith, my grandmother, also cared for my sister and me, as much as she could, for my father, Jeff. It was difficult to care for us because we were twins. She taught all she could before we lost her. She taught me how to sew, cook, and clean; she even taught me to draw a little. She was courageous when it came to family. Visitation was at most, a privilege; I especially loved to visit her sister, brothers, mother, and father.

Every Wednesday, Grandmother and I would watch our favorite show. *Lingo*, the show, was about spelling words by the given genre and letters. Judith was talented at this, and if invited on the show, she would probably win. I sat by her side always guessing and learning new words by asking the same question, "Mom-mom, what does that mean?" Whistling softly due to a missing front tooth she would answer with delight; I guess because I was learning or because she liked to spend time with me. She rounded the edges that peaked my learning curiosity. I loved those days.

Judith became very ill. She had to be transferred to the hospital to see if they could cure her illness. I was about to start sixth grade and was enrolled in a summer camp. One day, the camp went to a farm to pick berries. I saw a new variety of berries I did not think even existed; the yellow raspberries looked especially strange, so I packed a view for Judith to enjoy with me. I thought she would like the fact that they were exotic looking. I entered the hospital room; I then checked the room number because the frail and pale woman in the bed did not look like my Grandmother. I walked to the edge of the bed, "Hi... Mom-Mom" I said. A tear rolled down her cheek as she struggled to talk. "Hi Sweetie." I handed her the raspberries, she opened them and said they were interesting and different. She ate a few and then could not finish it because of her lack of strength. I saw the tanks and other strange tubes hooked up to her. I gave her a big hug and then dad said it was time to go. As we were leaving I turned to wave goodbye, but she was already asleep. She looked peaceful, as if drifting into the serenity she deserves. That was the last time I saw my grandmother, she died of lung cancer, at the age of 75.

Everyone who knew my grandmother called her Faye. She told me before she passed that her real name was Judith and she always wanted to be called by her "real name." I did so in this passage as a tribute to her. My grandmother had Character, Character that I wish to carry on to my own children. She always was caring, I am caring, and I hope my children will be caring also.

11th Grade – 1st Place

Not available.

11th Grade – 2nd Place

Out of all the things I could write about, I choose to write about my grandfather. He has truly shown me what it means to have character and to be a good person. He was an extraordinary man that had an impact on everybody he knew.

Victor Joaque Guest, was his name and if you are wondering about the middle name it is Cherokee. My grandfather had native blood and some would say that is where he got his free spirit.

He was born and raised in a small town in Texas. He was one of ten children and so poor you cannot possibly imagine. He had to drop out of school at a young age to help support his family.

Growing up I can remember my grandfather telling me stories of his childhood. I can remember when I was younger I got a splinter in my foot and I complained about it. My grandfather said, "You think that's bad? When I was a young running around outside without shoes and stepped on a piece of glass, it cut it all the way down to the bone. We couldn't afford medical bills though so all we could do was hold it together." It made me realize how lucky I was to grow up in a family that could afford things like shoes, and health insurance, enough food to eat, things that my grandfather wasn't as fortunate to have.

To make things worse financially and emotionally, my grandfather lost his mother during his teenage years. Being the oldest, it became his responsibility to take care of his brothers and sisters, as well as his now depressed father. Despite all of the misfortune placed upon his shoulders, he was always an optimistic person and could always find the good in something.

Coming from nothing, my grandfather made something of himself. He went back to school and got an education. He married my grandmother and got a job as a car sales man. He worked his way up the chain and eventually owned his own dealership in Austin.

Knowing what it is like to not have anything, my grandfather gave back to the community as much as he could. He did a lot of volunteer work, and encouraged me to do so too. He also donated to a lot of local charities.

My grandfather is my role model, and even though he has passed away the things he did in his life will always be remembered. He has shown me what it means to take on responsibility, and to care for the people around you.

If it was not for my grandfather and learning about his experiences and hardships I do not think I would be the person that I am today. He has shown me not to judge people by where they come from or how they grew up but by what kind of person they are. He has also taught me to help the less fortunate and to be a kind giving person, to take on responsibility when I need to and to Genuinely care for people.

His character is the reason I am the person I am today.

11th Grade – 3rd Place

Character Counts! morals are intertwined into our lives constantly, everyday. The pillars that are presented to us represent so much more than just being “nice,” or being friendly. They represent only partially what it takes to have good character. To be of good character means that you do not carry the pillars with you to get an award, or to just be able to say you did. To be of good character means you carry the pillars with you without thinking twice about it.

Two pillars that have distinctly stood out to me are Fairness and Trustworthiness. I feel these pillars are very much alike, but at the same time they are each their own. The ways these two pillars have impacted my life recently are through tennis. In tennis, it is very important that you display all the pillars, but these two in particular.

The level of tennis at which I am practicing and competing, I am my own line judge. My opponent is able to question my call, but in the end, if the ball lands on my side of the court, then I make the decision for the outcome of the point. You are in charge of yourself, making sure you are being honest and fair, and not just getting caught up in wanting to win that point. Fairness is not only hoped for, but also expected when one walks out onto the court. To me, fairness is about being honest and seeing things from an objective standpoint. If you enter a situation with nothing but an objective outlook, you are only going to be completely fair. This is the mindset I try to go into each match with, wanting my opponent and I to play to the best of our ability, not just doing anything to get the win. Being fair also entails having the dignity to be able to meet your opponent at the net when the match is over and shake their hand, knowing you played fairly.

The other pillar that goes hand in hand with Fairness is Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is important in so many aspects of life. Without trust, you really have nothing. Approaching this pillar with regards to tennis, it is just like being fair when you call the lines, but opposite. You have to be able to trust that your opponent is going to determine the right call as well. There has to be a mutual trust factor present when playing a tennis match. Another way trustworthiness plays into tennis is when keeping track of the score. Both players are supposed to be keeping track of the score, but I'll admit, I don't always do. When I forget to keep track of the score, I am putting a lot of trust in my opponent's hands. I am trusting that they will not cheat for their benefit; just as they are trusting that I will not cheat for my benefit.

The game of tennis teaches so much more than just how to hit a ball into a certain portion of space. It teaches morals and values in a way that can't necessarily be plainly said. I strongly believe all the pillars have an astounding presence on the tennis court, and these were just the two that I felt have had the most impact on my game. Character Counts! is something that all of us should make an effort to show in whatever sport, or activity, or job that we attempt. Being a "nice" or friendly person doesn't mean you allow yourself to get stepped on or pushed over, it just means you handle those situations with grace, dignity, and respect.

12th Grade – 1st Place

Responsibility is and always will be a very important part of education. This has always been true throughout my experiences. In order to gain a valuable education, a student must possess and maintain a certain level of responsibility. In high school these responsibilities include staying attentive and receptive in class, ensuring the completion of all assignments (with quality work), continuing to be cooperative with educators, and inquiring about any uncompleted assignments. Responsibility is also required in order to balance school efforts, extracurricular activities such as sports, and a quality social life. I have utilized all of these skills in order to stay on track through high school and to achieve my end goal, getting accepted into a university of my choice.

A major factor in the decision making process that these universities go through is strictly contingent upon the academic comprehension of a student. The universities look at several things including GPA, difficulty of a student's schedule, and standardized test scores such as ACT's & SAT's. As I suggested earlier, a student has to work diligently in order to succeed in all of these areas. One of the ways I work to strive in such areas is checking my grades at least twice a week.

This is important because not all teachers will notify their students of missing work. This places the responsibility in the student's hands. Another aspect is that not all teachers will tell students which sections to concentrate on when studying or the amount of studying required to be successful. If a student wants a high GPA they have to put in the effort that it requires. Regarding the standardized tests; students are not required to take them. This means that the student has to be responsible and show the initiative to sign up and complete the test(s). I took the SAT's three times to ensure adequate scores.

In order for colleges to take these scores and myself into consideration, I must apply to them. The application processes for the schools that I applied to were quite thorough. These colleges asked for my entire educational background (with transcript), extracurricular activity information, a personally written essay, and at least one recommendation from one of my former or current educators. All of this information about myself had to be sent to the universities by a certain date. I was responsible for gathering all of this information and these documents by those dates and verifying that all of it was presentable. I received minor amounts of assistance from my mother and the guidance office. However, nobody held my hand and walked me through this process. I had to persevere and make sure that I fully presented myself to the colleges in the best way I could. The responsibility of meeting deadlines does not just apply in school. It is a constant occurrence in life that is essential to master in order for a person to be successful.

Getting accepted to a university of my choice is just one of the obstacles of the college experience. Another impediment that is often overlooked is the affair of paying for college. I must be very meticulous when it comes to financing my education beyond high school. I have already completed the FASFA so that I have an excellent chance of receiving any financial aid that I am eligible for. The government distributes more aid to students who apply earlier so I made sure to get in all of the required items as quick as possible. I also must guarantee that I apply for multiple scholarships and meet their deadlines. Any assistance helps reduce the cost of college and being responsible now can reduce the amount I have to pay later in life.

All of the aforementioned factors go into deciding my personal college experience. I have recognized that I have worked and been quite responsible thus far. I must meticulously continue this responsibility if I aspire to be successful in college. If I am successful there, I am confident that I will be prepared for the "real world" where I will have to support myself and be responsible for all of my own life decisions.

12th Grade – 2nd Place

Character counts,
Builds us into who we become
Shapes our lives,
Alters our views,
Teaches us proper behaviors
As we grow in this world.

Between women and men
Teachers and students,
We all demand the respect
For equality in the classroom.

Various activities fill up our days
Many invite us to join and play,
In band, sports and clubs alike
We learn to be fair, not to fight.

First the clubs,
Drama was my niche
Teaching me to be responsible
In learning my lines
To become a character.

Second came the Environment,
Where peers share a passion
For critters and creatures,
The ground and the trees
We act as concerned citizens
By trying to restore the health
Of their homes and families.

Sports came third,
With my interest at a question,
I soon became encouraged
Even though running was not
My best ability,
My coach was caring and enthused
He believed in what I could do.

Last came my greatest interest of all

The place that I fit in the most,
So welcoming it became a second home.
Band is where we build a trust,
Though everyone carries their own weight
We carry each other and just like a family,
We are dependent on one another.

12th Grade – 3rd Place

A sense of understanding deep inside
No two people are exactly the same
Let go of grudges and let your heart guide
Down winding passages lit with a flame
It may be difficult some of the time
Forgiving others' differences and flaws
You may find some to be truly sublime
And others simply just not worth a pause

But to insult one out of pure contempt
Is really just not very befitting
No matter what, you are just not exempt
From good manners, aware, or unwitting

Respect those you like and those you do not
And yourself most of all or all is for naught